

## Consumer Liaison Group Meeting Summary September 21, 2023

### Introduction

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The **Consumer Liaison Group (CLG)** is a forum for sharing information between ISO New England (the ISO or ISO-NE) and electricity consumers in New England. The CLG meets quarterly and attracts a diverse group of attendees at each meeting. Meetings are free and open to the public. Participants generally include consumers and consumer representatives (including state consumer and ratepayer advocates), state business and industry associations, chambers of commerce, individual businesses, trade groups, nonprofit organizations, and other end users. Several New England Power Pool (NEPOOL) members and state regulators are also regular, active participants in CLG discussions.<sup>1</sup> CLG meetings generally follow the same format:

- **Opening remarks** from the CLG Coordinating Committee Chair;
- **A representative from the ISO**, who provides an update on regional energy issues and initiatives that have or will be taking place at NEPOOL and ISO stakeholder meetings that can have an impact on electricity prices;
- **A keynote speech** typically from an industry or business executive, policymaker, or regulator—who provides a unique perspective on a particular topic or issue;
- **A panel discussion**, often representing industry, the ISO, regulators, and consumer perspectives, facilitated by a moderator; and
- **A community roundtable** hosted by a CLG Coordinating Committee member.

The following is a brief summary of the meeting, which was hosted in a hybrid format – remotely (via WebEx) and in-person in Burlington, Vermont – on **September 21, 2023**.

The topic, moderator, and panelists were selected by the Consumer Liaison Group Coordinating Committee (CLGCC). The meeting summary is intended to capture the general discussions that took place at the meeting; it does not necessarily reflect the views of the ISO or the CLGCC.

### September 21: Ratepayer Advocates' Role in Navigating the Clean Energy Future

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**Meeting objective:** Discuss the role of the New England ratepayer advocates as the region transitions to a decarbonized energy future, learn about electrification and sustainability efforts from Green Mountain Power, hear from ISO New England on regional updates, and host a community roundtable.

#### Opening Remarks

**Jacob Powsner**, CLGCC member (Vermont), offered welcoming remarks and thanks to everyone who helped coordinate the meeting, and introduced the program for the day.

A community welcome was provided by Vermont residents, Leif Taranta and Julie Macuga. They provided an introduction to the community of Burlington, the impacts of climate change in Vermont, and environmental justice challenges in Burlington and throughout the state. Taranta and Macuga provided highlights of efforts to promote climate solutions.

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<sup>1</sup> NEPOOL is a group formed in 1971 by the region's private and municipal utilities to foster cooperation and coordination among the utilities in the six-state region for ensuring a dependable supply of electricity. Today, NEPOOL members are ISO stakeholders and market participants. More information is available at [www.nepool.com](http://www.nepool.com).

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### Keynote Address

**Tiana Smith**, head of electrification and sustainability at Green Mountain Power (GMP), provided the keynote address. Smith introduced GMP and discussed impacts of climate change in Vermont. She provided an overview of the GMP climate solution efforts such as microgrids, energy storage for resiliency and to reduce peak demand hours, climate resiliency, and electrification incentives. Smith spotlighted the microgrid in Paton, Vermont; the establishment of resiliency zones and pilots to target resiliency projects; the innovative battery program; electric vehicle rebate program; and heat pump electrification efforts.

Smith addressed questions related to the cost to operate an all-electric home; the process to create and costs of the resiliency zones; funding and cost-recovery mechanisms for the GMP programs; utility-scale battery storage projects; the electricity generation mix for the resiliency zones; energy storage usage for communities within resiliency zones; and the McNeil generating station.

### ISO New England Update

**Anne George**, vice president and chief external affairs and communications officer at ISO-NE, provided the ISO's regional update. George introduced the external affairs team and highlighted Sarah Adams from the team who helps to coordinate the CLG meetings and is the ISO's state policy advisor covering the state of Vermont.

George explained that the ISO participated in the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's (FERC) second [New England Winter Gas-Electric Forum](#) on June 20 in Portland, Maine. The ISO [pre-filed comments](#) responding to FERC's questions, and presentations were submitted before the forum. A [recording](#) of the forum is available on the FERC website.

George provided an overview of the Operational Impact of Extreme Weather Events – Energy Adequacy Study. The ISO is working with the Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI) to conduct a probabilistic energy adequacy study for New England under extreme weather events. Study results are intended to inform the region about future energy adequacy risks. George briefly reviewed the ISO's existing 21-day energy assessment as it relates to the recent analysis. Preliminary results of the energy assessments have been completed for [2027 winter](#) and [summer](#) events, and [2032 winter](#) and [summer](#) events. George noted that stakeholders were invited to request additional sensitivity cases, which will be reviewed at the November 14 NEPOOL Reliability Committee meeting.

George provided an overview of the 2050 Transmission Study, developed in conjunction with the New England states, which looks beyond the typical 10-year planning horizon. ISO plans to organize the 2050 Transmission Study report around a few key themes, based on trends observed while performing the analysis. The report is underway and a draft is anticipated in November. George's presentation highlighted a few key takeaways of the report to date.

George explained the [ISO budget](#) approval process and the proposed 2024 operating and capital budgets. The step-up in grid complexity represents a considerable increase to ISO workload and thus the ISO budget reflects an increase to meet the needs of the grid transition. Five of the six New England states requested a position on environmental justice. In response, the ISO added a placeholder in the budget related to this request.

George followed up on questions posed in the community roundtable at the last meeting. The topics included the status of regional and federal policies regarding a price on carbon; opportunities for electric vehicles to be utilized to address peak hours; and plans to ensure reliability through the winter season.

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A question and answer period took place following the presentation in which George answered questions regarding the ISO budget; the future of electric infrastructure development; ISO's role in the clean energy transition; the scale of transactions in the wholesale electricity markets; New England state comments on the ISO budget; and types of funding for electric transmission development.

### **Community Roundtable**

**Kendra Ford**, CLGCC member (New Hampshire), explained the process for the community roundtable, a feature for interaction with attendees that the Coordinating Committee introduced at the June meeting. Four prompts were provided for both in-person and virtual WebEx attendees. Attendees were encouraged to respond to the prompts, and the CLGCC will consider the feedback in planning for future CLG meetings. The community roundtable exercise is intended to continue at CLG meetings moving forward. The CLGCC posed the following questions to meeting participants:

- 1) As a ratepayer, what issues brought you to this meeting? (Rank the following: cost of my electricity, the reliability of unlimited electricity whenever I want, the environmental impacts involved in electricity generation, impacts of generation and transmission on my community, my ability to participate in and engage in regional grid planning, I like to stay up-to-date with current issues in the industry, other)
  - a. Please explain your ranking. If you have "other" concerns please list them.
- 2) One of ISO New England's mandates is to ensure grid reliability in our region. Which of the following approaches do you think are most important to grid reliability? Please rank their order of priority based on what you believe ISO-NE should focus on most. (Building infrastructure resilience to extreme weather events, mitigating and adapting climate change, reducing and managing overall energy demand to lessen the intensity of peak loads, ensuring affordability of energy for ratepayers, maintaining a forward capacity market as the mechanism for ensuring reliability, maintaining and/or increasing natural gas capacity, ensuring that generators compete on a level playing field regardless of state subsidies, expanding transmission lines between Hydro-Quebec and New England, other)
  - a. Please explain your ranking. If you have "other" priorities please list them.
- 3) How are ratepayers currently disenfranchised from providing input on decisions of grid management? If you could design the system, how would ratepayer input and priorities be integrated into the way the system works?
- 4) What ratepayer-centered issues would you like to hear discussed at a future CLG meeting?

### **Panel Discussion**

**Liz Anderson**, chair of the CLGCC (Massachusetts) and chief of the Energy and Telecommunications division at the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office, introduced and moderated a panel of New England ratepayer advocates to discuss their role in the transition to a clean energy future.

Panelists included: **Lou Cecere**, planning engineer, Vermont Department of Public Service; **William Dornbos**, legal director, Connecticut Office of Consumer Counsel; **Ashley Gagnon**, assistant attorney general, Energy and Telecommunications Division, Massachusetts Attorney General's Office; **Linda D. George**, administrator, Rhode Island Division of Public Utilities & Carriers; **Donald M. Kreis**, consumer advocate, New Hampshire Office of the Consumer Advocate; and **Andrew Landry**, deputy public advocate, Maine Office of the Public Advocate.

**Lou Cecere** presented on Vermont electricity regulation and system planning. Cecere introduced the Vermont Department of Public Service (DPS) and their role in energy planning, compliance

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review, and public advocacy. Cecere highlighted the key components of the Vermont regulatory structure, including the legislature, public utility commission, and distribution utilities, and outlined the processes and entities involved in transmission planning. Cecere explained the current status of and planning for distributed generation integration in the state, and noted the impacts of efforts to pursue beneficial electrification along with considerations of load shifting strategies.

**Ashley Gagnon** began with a review of the Massachusetts' Office of Ratepayer Advocacy within the Office of the Attorney General, as established by statute, and their role advocating for ratepayers across state, regional, and federal engagements. Gagnon explained the New England Power Pool (NEPOOL) structure, authority, and participants. In particular, Gagnon highlighted that the New England consumer advocates are able to participate in NEPOOL on behalf of ratepayers as part of the end-user sector.

**Andrew Landry** introduced the role of the Office of the Public Advocate (OPA) in Maine. The OPA serves as an advocate for consumers of utility service and participates in a variety of forums including, the Maine Public Utilities Commission (PUC), Maine legislature, and regional and federal forums (including NEPOOL and FERC). The Maine Public Advocate is appointed by the Governor for a fixed term. Current key issues of the office include reliability, achieving climate policies, and energy affordability. Landry highlighted the OPA's interest in utilizing strategies – such as demand response, energy efficiency and energy storage – to reduce projected peak loads as the region moves towards a clean energy future.

**Linda D. George** introduced the Rhode Island PUC and Division of Public Utilities and Carriers ("Division"). George explained that the Division and PUC work independently, but in cooperation. The jurisdiction of the Division includes advocating on behalf of ratepayers, and regulating electric, natural gas, and water (and limited telecommunication) utilities and ferries. George explained that the Division enforces PUC orders, regulates common carriers, addresses customer complaints, approves PUC issuances of debt and equity, runs a robust gas safety program, engages in interstate and federal energy matters, and reviews mergers and acquisitions that require FERC approval. George highlighted that the Division serves as a source of objective, independent energy analysis for state decision-makers and educates the public on energy issues, including "issue briefs" on the Division website. George noted that the Division engages with the ISO as a member of NEPOOL's end-user sector.

**Donald M. Kreis** introduced the role of the consumer advocate in New Hampshire and highlighted that while New Hampshire does not have statutory decarbonization goals, the public advocate will continue to support efforts for energy efficiency. In terms of regional interests, Kreis explained his focus on encouraging a transparent decision-making process at NEPOOL and the ISO, and noted the important role of the CLG in engaging with New England ratepayers. Kreis explained the office's interest in pursuing changes to the transmission owner's asset condition project process and ongoing focus on cost-effective energy reliability. Kreis also highlighted an opening for a new fulltime position in his office to serve as director of regional and federal affairs.

**William Dornbos** introduced the Connecticut Office of Consumer Counsel and its mission to help and protect ratepayers, and its vision to help rebalance the relationship between utilities and ratepayers, including to reform utility regulation. Dornbos highlighted two examples of efforts to accomplish this vision including a new law for utility regulators to ban cost recovery of select utility expenses and ongoing dockets related to performance-based regulation (PBR). Dornbos concluded by highlighting the need for ratepayer interests to be an ongoing component of the clean energy transition.

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A question and answer period followed the panelists' remarks. Panelists responded to questions regarding the use of biomass at the McNeil generating station; consideration of costs of climate impacts in ratepayer advocate decision-making; the ISO New England Board of Directors; and New England's ability to reach climate goals while maintaining consideration of rate impacts.

### **Closing remarks**

**Liz Anderson** offered closing remarks and thanked everyone who helped to organize the CLG meeting. The final 2023 CLG meeting is scheduled for December 6 in Boston, Massachusetts.

A [recording](#) of the meeting can be found on the [CLG page](#) on the ISO website.